

CHAPLAIN'S ESPRIT DE CORPS

BY

CHAPLAIN (CAPT) THOMAS F. EGAN

U. S. Army Chaplain School

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PURPOSE:

Much has been written about the Chaplain in his relations with every form of activity, as far as his duties to God and Country are concerned, but very little if anything has been said about his relations with his fellow Chaplains.

There are no text books on this subject and therefore I do feel free in presenting my side of the story. No doubt there will be criticisms, but more important there might be some further contributions along this same line of thought that may produce a better understanding amongst the Chaplains now serving in the Chaplains^{cy} Corps of the United States Army.

The word UNDERSTANDING is of the greatest importance in this discussion. My efforts in this paper are to present from the Military and Moral points of view why the Chaplaincy should have an even greater Esprit de Corps than any other group in the Military Service.

PROLOUGUE:

THE CHAPLAIN SCHOOL WHERE CHAPLAINS
OF ALL FAITHS MEET..... BUT IS THERE
UNDERSTANDING?

"And the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night, saying: Ask what thou wilt that I should give to thee. And Solomon said: Give...to thy servant an understanding heart... And the Lord said to Solomon: Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life or riches, nor the lives of thy enemies but has asked for thyself wisdom to discern judgment, behold I have done for thee according to thy words...and the things also which thou didst not ask, I have given thee."

3 Kings. 3:3, 69, 11-13

Chaplains' Esprit de Corps

The Chaplain is a clergyman in uniform. That no one can deny. The mere fact that he has joined the service of his country, he is dedicated to bringing religious truths to his men. He must by virtue of his "calling", or "vocation", live up to the teachings of his Faith, and so bring to those under his care the Word of God.

He represents religion which teaches fortitude, reverence, and justice, as well as, kindness, sympathy, and humility. These particular virtues are applicable in every walk of life, but most especially in the life of the Chaplain. When we consider that the mission of the Chaplain is to promote religion and morality in the army and to minister to the spiritual and moral needs of the military personnel, their dependents, and authorized civilians, we realize to some extent the nature of the work that must be accomplished by the Chaplain.

It is pointed out in Army Regulations that: "The relationship of Chaplains to one another are characterized by UNDERSTANDING, MUTUAL RESPECT AND FRATERNAL CHARITY." It further states that differences in religious beliefs and practices do not exclude a mutual, cooperative effort to represent religion in the military community. The dignity and dedicated character of the Chaplain's calling dictate that he provide

to all, an example of WISDOM and the LOVE OF GOD and his FELLOW MAN.

We are men of God dedicated to Him and determined that we shall bring God to man and Man to God. How can we do this successfully when there is no real esprit amongst us? I mean Esprit in the real sense of the word. The life of any socially upright individual is organized around only a few basic loyalties, and the degree of satisfaction which he derives from existence can usually be measured in terms of his service to them. He is loyal first to himself, for failing that, he fails in loyalty to all else. If he cannot acquit himself for his own sake, he cannot do honor to anything less personal. Along with loyalty to self come loyalty to our own beliefs, loyalty to family, loyalty to country, loyalty to friends, and loyalty to humanity in general.

This loyalty, is exemplified in other professional fields. The doctors and lawyers, to mention only two specific groups, have an intense loyalty to the rest of the men in their profession. It is a part of professional ethics not to publicly criticize or condemn the actions, which are of a purely professional nature, of their counterparts in the same profession. Especially do we see this in the Medical profession. Doctors recognize their right to their own opinion, and in diagnosing a case that is their prerogative.

If some other doctor disagrees with the diagnosis, he will not in the presence of the patient condemn the other man, or criticize him, but will merely offer his own opinion. This loyalty goes even further when it is known that within their own group they will offer constructive criticism, defend the advice given, even though it cannot be accepted, simply because they have a pride and a strong loyalty to their fellow doctors.

These men are cognizant of the fact that they have submitted to a course of study which was to prepare them with the necessary scientific facts of medicine to perform their duties. They are dedicated to curing the sick and bringing relief to those in pain. The manner in which they apply the truths they have learned is something personal. No two doctors react the same way nor do they use the same approach in dealing with their patients. They can be as opposite as day and night in their techniques yet accomplish the same end which is the relief of the sick and suffering. The truths of medicine are at their disposal, and it is up to each one to apply these principles in keeping with his own conscience.

The Chaplain, above all, has loyalties that far surpass those of any other professional man. He is first and foremost dedicated to God. He is constantly on display as a man of God. He is judged, respected, loved, revered, and condemned in so far as he lives up to that exalted position. The naturally good virtues are not enough for him. He must possess these same virtues that are admired in others, but he must elevate them to a supernatural state. In other words, they must be displayed to an eminent degree.

If a good living man is expected to be kind, patient, honest, truthful, just and charitable and to exercise prudence, temperance, consideration, forgiveness and understanding to others; then how much more so is the dedicated man, the Chaplain, obligated to present these virtues to his fellow man, by practicing what he preaches. It is almost a paradox but the Chaplain can, and many times is, the worst offender.

We know the loyalty that exists to a degree in even the smallest unit in the Army, the loyalty of one member of the command to another. No matter what the personal feelings of disdain might be, no matter how intense the dislike for an individual within the command, real loyalty will not permit this man to be publicly castigated in front of members of another unit. He will be defended, excused, and even fought for, to prevent any disgrace or condemnation of his unit.

This is a natural kind of loyalty and is not to be condemned, unless moral principles are involved. One cannot condone or excuse the evil or wrong doing, but it is possible to exercise charity, since no mortal is capable of knowing the motives for anothers actions.

Since we cannot escape from our human limitations and because we will always be subject to personality differences, we come to the problem of Esprit de Corps in the Chaplaincy. Can there be a real loyalty to each other when there is such a marked difference in our religious convictions? Can a Protestant, Jew and Catholic reconcile their individual religious and moral convictions and develop a real fraternal loyalty that would make our Corps the example of Charity and Understanding?

It is not a question of reconciling our religious beliefs, for we cannot make black - white, nor white - black under the same conditions at the same time, but again there can be a much better spirit of understanding that would take away much of the unwarranted bad publicity we receive from private judgement, because of our failure to practice charity and our displeasure at trying to understand the religious convictions and personal behaviours of our fellow chaplains.

It is not enough to get along with one another, to be nice to each other when we are together, it is the judgements that are passed, the snide remarks made, the cutting, derogatory, fallacious statements that are made in public that do so much to tear down, or at least to tarnish the high esteem that should be held for the Chaplaincy. The Chaplains meet but do they have understanding?

There is nothing more undermining to our esprit than to have misunderstanding on the part of the Chaplains. This misunderstanding when it is carried outside to friends and neighbors make it appear that we are at each others throats. Too often this is true. What might be an innocent remark at a bull session with the clergy takes on an entirely different meaning when it is reported outside. The number of times that the Chaplain has been taken over the coals at a luncheon, bridge party, cocktail-get-together and informal sessions with the laity, lead one to believe that a favorite pastime is discussing the faults of the Chaplains. It is a most natural diversion, for certainly if the laity can find fault with out^r conduct or actions they have, or feel as though they have, an excuse for their own misconduct. There is no excuse by solace is found in knowing that "even the Chaplain" goofed.

Embarrassing is it when confronted with the observation by a member of ones own faith...did you know that Chaplain so an⁴so did this or that? So many of these incidents could be minimized if there were a true spirit of loyalty to our own dedication. This dedication, if it is sincere, means the complete giving of oneself to God in order that we might lead others to a knowledge and love of Him.

Unfortunately, and I say this with only personal observation and contact, how much Charity is displayed on the part of the Chaplain in so many of his civilian contacts when it concerns a fellow Chaplain of a different Faith. The calling to serve God, in whatever manner possible, does not deprive us of the human element, inherent in us, and that is to judge others when there is no possible way of knowing the other ones MOTIVES. Judgement is passed by reason of the external actions which can be observed, and this is not a complete and true picture of the internal and motivating circumstances which precipitated the action.

When the personal feelings which we experience towards another are publicly or verbally expressed to another, we have consciously or unconsciously made a very forceful impression upon his mind and this has lasting effects. These opinions which are expressed, when they are derogatory, are bound to disrupt and lower the Esprit of the Corps.

If lowering the Esprit of the Corps were limited only to the Chaplaincy itself it would be bad enough, but when the laity have the occasion to see the bad feelings that do exist amongst the members of the different denominations, there is no wonder that they, and I mean the military authorities also, have a watered down attitude toward the Chaplains.

It is not so much a lack of knowledge of military affairs and ability to operate as a Line Officer that causes bad feelings in military circles, as the lack of understanding and kindness and consideration for all members of the Command that is infuriating to those who occupy the position of authority. How often has a Chaplain in rightful indignation, contradicted, opposed, misinterpreted all the good intentions of his fellow chaplain? Does not the Commanding Officer have cognizance of this fact? To the detriment of the Chaplains ^{and} Corps another problem has been created. Now he has to solve the problems of the chaplains themselves. These problems should never have been brought to his attention, and I contend that the lack of a real esprit de corps has caused this reaction. Cooperation and above all a little understanding could have alleviated much of this difficulty.

When Chaplains have their differences it should be in the same manner that any professional person would discuss differences of opinion. There is no reason to bring these matters to the attention of the public or even to the attention of higher authority, for such action only indicates that we are not truly an elite corps but simply the same as any other group not moulded together by a common bond. Our bond is still the love of God, and while we are not seeking to serve God

in the same manner, by reason of our intellectual, moral and religious differences, we might at least have respect for the military organization that we serve - The Chaplains Corps - and attempt to have some understanding for our fellow chaplains.

Is it possible to establish this understanding in the Chaplaincy, and build a stronger Esprit de Corps? There is no question in my mind that it is possible and that an effort should be made on the part of the Catholic, Protestant and Jew to bring it about. If such an effort is not made, then the Chaplaincy will remain the wonderful organization that it is, but not fulfill the real potential that is within its grasp.

As a priest, I do not condemn the Protestant, the Jew and all those who are not member of the One, True, Church, but rather I have concern for their recognition of the truth even as I have. If a person is sincere, has taken the necessary steps to associate himself with the truth, then only God is his judge. We must live together and there must be a sense of honesty that prevails in our thinking and in our actions. Rather than finding fault, would it not be better to be the best we can with what Almighty God has given us? If this sense of constructive criticism could be offered, rather than the attitude of self importance, self promotion, self satisfaction be the guide, then we would have the basis for a better mutual understanding and Esprite de Corps.

Everything is gained by patience, understanding and the love of God. We are Chaplains, in the service of God and country, can we do less than observe the prayer of Solomon: "Give... to thy servant an understanding heart."

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